

Saint Andrews Hospital

Founded in 1360
By H.M. Edward III.



114 Grosvenor Lane
LONDON W.1.

Psychiatric Division,
Six H. Wolton Quarters

London, the 14th of July 1885

Confidential report concerning N° X.N.6

Dear Inspector Lestrade

Your enquiry dated the 10th of July is yet another example of the remarkable degree of efficiency attained by the information-gathering services of your splendid Police force. Criminals beware!

I understand your wish to settle the regrettable business to which you refer once and for all. The horror that took place in that padded cell on the night of the 16th of November 1837 left an indelible scar upon the minds of all those who witnessed it; indeed, Sir Henry Wolton, the then Head of Department, was unable to recover from the profound shock and elected to retire in January 1838.

Both as an psychiatrist and as a witness to those events, I shall shed what light I can upon those aspects of the affair which remain clouded in obscurity. I trust I may rely upon your legendary discretion and I beg your indulgence: 48 years have passed since that tragic night, and my memory is not what it was!

X.N.6 was admitted to our care following a voyage from North America. When I assumed my functions at St. Andrew's in 1836, he was prone to sudden bouts of violent frenzy. During such fits the patient was a considerable danger to himself and to others; confinement to a padded cell guaranteed his safety and precluded any possible attempted suicides,

not uncommon with this category of madman. Notwithstanding his social position, X.N.6 was without family and had few friends; we had little trouble ensuring that his contact with others was restricted to those members of staff concerned with his treatment and with the cleanliness of his person and cell.

Sir Henry, the most distinguished psychiatrist of his day, took a great personal interest in the case and attempted a number of daring therapies; indeed, X.N.6 seemed for a time to respond to mesmerism, or hypnosis as it is sometimes called. In the end, all his efforts proved to be in vain, however, and the patient's crazed ~~fit~~ fits became ever more frequent.

During such moments, X.N.6 would hurl himself against the padded walls of his cell whilst emitting wild screeches of terror. He foamed at the mouth quite profusely and his eyes rolled uncontrollably. In a second phase of the fit, he would grow strangely calm and intone what sounded like religious chants in an unknown language.

What ghastly vision had he experienced during his visit to North America? Sir Henry was convinced, and I can only concur, that the cause of the unhappy mystery lay buried within the tortured mind of our patient. How were we to extract these terrible secrets? Quite without warning, the fits ceased; the patient remained in an advanced catatonic state. The strait-jacket was deemed superfluous and removed. X.N.6 appeared to have given up the struggle for life. Had he decided to let himself expire?

There was a storm on the night of the 16th of November. The atmosphere was heavy and the heavens groaned with distant thunder. The patients were singularly restless, and only calmed down when it began to rain.

The corridor housing our padded cells rung with frightened cries. It would have taken a great deal more to unsettle the night-keeper, Barnes. At 10 o'clock, Sir Henry, who was treating an interesting case of lunacy in an adjacent cell, was astonished to overhear X.N.6 reciting aloud from the work of Milton: "Oh, my lord of misery..."

Sir Henry, filled with hope, rushed over to his patient's side, ignoring Barnes' shout of warning. As the doctor's face, filled with kindly concern, leaned forward, X.N.6's hands flew up and gripped Sir Henry's cheeks. The madman's long fingernails ripped the doctor's face; blood dripped from a badly gashed lip. X.N.6 screamed gibberish, referring repeatedly to a certain "THOOL-HOO", and claiming vengeance and a return. Barnes ran up, his cudgel ready. X.N.6, seeing the keeper, released Sir Henry and leaped at Barnes with astonishing agility.

As you know, Barnes' eyes were ripped from their sockets. The poor fellow died of blood-poisoning several weeks later. X.N.G., extenuated by his outburst, died of heart failure shortly afterwards - his final moments were not without pathos: his desperate efforts to twist free of the strait-jacket reminded one of an undulating snake shedding its skin. Then his face was filled with an expression of horror, as if he had become aware of the senseless destruction he had perpetrated. I shall never forget his look of disbelief when, in a final moment of lucidity, he discovered what his mouth had spat out, what his teeth had chewed!

The various reports, medical and legal, already in your possession will provide you with ~~all~~ all the necessary details -

Please find enclosed some documents from my personal files (How the blazes did you know? Was it our mutual friend, C.D.?) - Apart from the certificate countersigned by Doctor J.W., the material is of little use. Captain Robins' STATEMENT is as good an EXAMPLE as any - X.N.G. had few if any objects of a personal nature upon admission to the hospital - I did indeed possess three of his sketches (his lordship was a gifted artist) but I parted with them not long ago; they will no doubt make an appearance in the sale-rooms one of these days.

Do please inform me when this unhappy case is finally closed. I am adding the address of my new surgery: I have decided to devote my life to the fight against the evils of poverty in the poorer areas of our great city.

May God in his infinite pity grant that we forget...

Your humble servant,
Jack Thornton Reeves
Intern in psychiatric medicine -
Private surgery: Mitre Square,
Whitechapel - London

Jack Thornton Reeves